

1 WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

2 1. A method for referring patients to practitioners said method  
3 comprising:  
4 certifying a group of practitioners to perform a medical procedure;  
5 identifying individual patients who wish to receive the procedure; and  
6 providing to the identified individual patients a list of certified practitioners,  
7 wherein those practitioners who have performed more procedures than others of the  
8 practitioners are placed preferentially on the list.

1 2. A method as in claim 1, wherein certifying the practitioners comprises  
2 training practitioners.

1 3. A method as in claim 1 or 2, wherein certifying the practitioners  
2 comprises testing the practitioners.

1 4. A method as in claim 1 or 2, wherein certifying comprises requiring  
2 that the practitioners have performed at least one procedure.

1 5. A method as in claim 1, further comprising removing practitioners  
2 from the certified group.

1 6. A method as in claim 1, wherein the practitioners are placed into tiers  
2 based on the number of procedures performed and wherein practitioners from higher tiers are  
3 preferentially placed on lists.

1 7. A method as in claim 6, wherein the individual practitioners are  
2 randomly ordered within a tier.

1 8. A method as in claim 6 or 7, wherein each tier is defined by a threshold  
2 number of procedures performed over a selected period of time.

1 9. A method as in claims 6 or 7, wherein each tier is defined by the  
2 aggregate number of procedures performed.

1 10. A method as in claim 6, wherein the practitioners are assigned to at  
2 least three tiers.

1           11.     A method as in claim 10, wherein the practitioners are assigned to an  
2     initial tier when they become certified, to an intermediate tier when they treat a first threshold  
3     number of patients over a preselected time period, and to a higher tier when they treat a  
4     second threshold number of patients over the preselected time period.

1           12.     A method as in claim 1, wherein identifying individual patients  
2     comprises collecting names and contact information from individual patients.

1           13.     A method as in claim 12, wherein at least some of the individual  
2     patients contact the coordinator in response to solicitations.

1           14.     A method for referring patients to dental practitioners, said method  
2     comprising:  
3                 certifying dental practitioners to perform a dental procedure;  
4                 informing a potential patient population of the availability of the procedure;  
5                 identifying individual patients who wish to receive the procedure;  
6                 providing to the identified individual patients referral lists of certified  
7     practitioners wherein individual practitioners are preferentially placed on the referral lists  
8     based on one or more performance criteria.

1           15.     A method as in claim 14, wherein the performance criteria include the  
2     number of dental procedures performed over a preselected time period.

1           16.     A method as in claim 14 or 15, wherein the performance criteria  
2     include data relating to successful patient outcomes.

1           17.     A method as in claim 14, wherein informing comprises soliciting  
2     patients.

1           18.     A method as in claim 17, wherein soliciting comprises advertising in  
2     print and/or electronic media.

1           19.     A method as in claim 14, wherein certifying the dental practitioners  
2     comprises training the dental practitioners.

1           20.     A method as in claim 14 or 19, wherein certifying the dental  
2     practitioners comprises testing the dental practitioners.

1                   21.     A method as in claim 14 or 19, wherein certifying comprises requiring  
2     that the dental practitioners have performed at least one procedure.

1                   22.     A method as in claim 14, further comprising removing dental  
2     practitioners from the certified group.

1                   23.     A method as in claim 15, wherein the dental practitioners are placed  
2     into tiers based on the number of procedures performed and wherein the tiers are arranged in  
3     order on the list.

1                   24.     A method as in claim 23, wherein the individual dental practitioners  
2     are randomly ordered within a tier.

1                   25.     A method as in claim 23, wherein the dental practitioners are assigned  
2     to at least three tiers.

1                   26.     A method as in claim 23 to 25, wherein each tier is defined by a  
2     threshold number of procedures performed over a selected period of time.

1                   27.     A method as in claim 23 to 25, wherein each tier is defined by an  
2     aggregate number of procedures performed.

1                   28.     A method as in claim 25, wherein the dental practitioners are assigned  
2     to an initial tier when they become certified, to an intermediate tier when they treat a first  
3     threshold number of patients over a preselected time period, and to a higher tier when they  
4     treat a second threshold number of patients over the preselected time period.

1                   29.     A method as in claim 14, wherein identifying individual patients  
2     comprises collecting names and contact information from individual patients who contact a  
3     coordinator.

1                   30.     A method as in claim 29, wherein at least some of the individual  
2     patients contact a referral center who produces the referral list in response to solicitations  
3     from the coordinator.

1                   31.     A method for referring patients to practitioners to perform a procedure  
2     said method comprising:

maintaining a referral directory which includes contact information for practitioners, wherein the practitioners are certified to perform the procedure and are prioritized in a plurality of tiers depending on the number of procedures that they have performed;

soliciting and receiving inquiries from prospective patients regarding the procedure; and

referring to individual patients at their requests practitioners within the patient's geographic area, wherein practitioners are selected from the referral directory in a manner which preferentially presents practitioners from tiers which require a higher number of procedures relative to practitioners from tiers which require a lower threshold number of procedures.

32. A method as in claim 31, wherein maintaining the referral directory comprises:

certifying practitioners to perform the procedure; and

tracking the number of times each certified practitioner performs the procedure to produce a performance number for each practitioner;

periodically updating the referral directory to reflect updated performance numbers.

33. A method as in claim 32, wherein the performance number comprises the aggregate number of procedures performed by an individual practitioner.

34. A method as in claim 32, wherein the performance number comprises the number of procedures performed by an individual practitioner over a predetermined time interval.

35. A method as in claim 31, wherein the plurality of tiers is at least three.

36. A method as in claim 31, wherein soliciting comprises advertising and providing contact information that permits a patient to contact a referral center.

37. A method as in claim 36, wherein the referral is a person.

38. A method as in claim 36, wherein the coordinator is an automated response system.

1                   39.     A method as in claim 31, wherein referring comprises:  
2                   determining the location of the patient's geographic area; and  
3                   generating from the referral directors a referral list of practitioners within the  
4 patient's geographic area, wherein the list includes a number of practitioners selected and/or  
5 arranged so that practitioners from higher tiers are preferentially referred.

1                   40.     A method as in claim 39, wherein the higher tiered practitioners are  
2 placed on lists in any geographic area more often than lower tiered practitioners.

1                   41.     A method as in claim 39, wherein the higher tiered practitioners are  
2 placed earlier on a single list than the lower tiered practitioners.

1                   42.     A method as in claim 31 wherein referring comprises:  
2                   determining the location of the patient's geographic area; and  
3                   selecting a single practitioner to be referred to the patient, wherein  
4 practitioners from higher tiers are selected more often than those from lower tiers.

1                   43.     A method as in claims 39 or 42, wherein all practitioners are included  
2 on at least some referral lists.

1                   44.     A method as in claim 31, wherein the referral directory comprises an  
2 electronic database, wherein soliciting comprises receiving voice or data inquiries from  
3 potential patients at a central location, and wherein referring comprises generating a referral  
4 list from the electronic database and responding to the inquiry by providing the referral list to  
5 the patient.

1                   45.     A method as in claim 44, wherein generating the referral list comprises  
2 presenting an ordered list of practitioners on a display screen and responding comprises  
3 reading at least some of the names of the practitioners to the potential patients.

1                   46.     A method for maintaining a referral directory, said method comprising:  
2 certifying practitioners to perform a medical procedure;  
3 tracking the number of times each certified practitioner performs the  
4 procedure; and  
5 maintaining a patient referral directory, wherein the practitioners are  
6 prioritized on the list based on the number of times each has performed the procedure.

1                   47.     A method as in claim 46, wherein certifying the practitioners  
2 comprises training practitioners.

1                   48.     A method as in claim 46 or 47, wherein certifying the practitioners  
2 comprises testing the practitioners.

1                   49.     A method as in claim 46 or 47, wherein certifying comprises requiring  
2 that the practitioners have performed at least one procedure.

1                   50.     A method as in claim 46, further comprising removing practitioners  
2 from the certified group.

1                   51.     A method as in claim 46, wherein tracking comprises determining the  
2 number of times a practitioner acquires a kit to perform the procedure on a patient.

1                   52.     A method as in claim 46, further comprising dividing the directory  
2 based on geographic location.

1                   53.     A method as in claim 52, wherein the list is divided into at least two  
2 tiers with practitioners who have performed more than a first threshold number of procedures  
3 being in a higher tier.

1                   54.     A method as in claim 53, wherein the list is divided into at least three  
2 tiers with practitioners who have performed more than a first threshold number of procedures  
3 being in a higher tier, those who have performed more than a second threshold number but  
4 less than the first being in a lower tier, and those who have performed less than the second  
5 threshold number being in a still lower tier.

1                   55.     A method as in any of claims 47, and 50 to 54, wherein the number of  
2 times the procedure is performed is measured periodically over a fixed time interval and the  
3 directory periodically updated.

1                   56.     A method as in any of claims 47, and 50 to 54, wherein the  
2 practitioners are not ordered within a tier.

1                   57.     A method as in any of claims 47, and 50 to 54, wherein the  
2 practitioners are further ranked within each tier based on the number of procedures  
3 performed.

1                   58.     A method as in claim 46, wherein the directory is maintained in an  
2 electronic database.

1                   59.     A method as in claim 58, further comprising generating a referral list  
2 for an individual patient from the patient referral directory, wherein the listed is generated  
3 automatically from the electronic database based on the patient's geographic location and  
4 wherein practitioners with a higher priority have an increased likelihood of appearing on any  
5 referral list.

1                   60.     A computer system for generating a list of medical practitioners for  
2 referring to potential patients, said system comprising:  
3                   means for maintaining a referral directory which includes contact information  
4 for practitioners who are certified to perform a procedure, wherein the practitioners are  
5 prioritized in a plurality of tiers depending on the number of procedures that they have  
6 performed; and  
7                   means for sorting practitioners on the referral directory to produce a referral  
8 list in response to an inquiry from a prospective patient in a particular geographic location  
9 wherein practitioners are first sorted based on proximity to the geographic location and then  
10 preferentially selected based on the tier to which the practitioner has been assigned.

1                   61.     A computer system as in claim 60, wherein the means for maintaining  
2 comprises an electronic database that is updateable to add and remove practitioners and to  
3 change the tier status of individual practitioners.

1                   62.     A computer system as in claim 60 or 61, wherein the electronic  
2 database includes at least three tiers with practitioners who have performed more than a first  
3 threshold number of procedures being in a higher tier, those who have performed more than a  
4 second threshold number but less than the first threshold number being in a lower tier, and  
5 those who have performed less than the second threshold number being in a still lower tier.

1                   63.     A computer system as in claim 62, wherein the number of times the  
2 procedure is performed is measured over a fixed time interval.

1                   64.     A computer system as in claim 62, wherein the number of times the  
2 procedure is performed is cumulative.

1                   65.     A computer system as in claim 60, wherein the practitioners are not  
2 ordered within a tier.

1                   66.     A computer system as in claim 60, wherein the practitioners are further  
2 ranked within each tier based on the number of procedures performed.

1                   67.     A computer system as in claim 60, wherein the means for sorting will  
2 select a plurality of practitioners for each referral list with at least practitioners from the  
3 highest tier being selected most often, those from the lower tier being selected less often, and  
4 those from the still lower tier being selected still less often.

1                   68.     A computer system as in claim 60, wherein only a single practitioner is  
2 selected for each referral list, with at least practitioners from the highest tier being selected  
3 most often, those from the lower tier being selected less often, and those from the still lower  
4 tier being selected still less often.

1                   69.     A computer system as in claim 60, wherein all practitioners are  
2 selected at least some of the time.

1                   70.     A computer system as in claim 60, further comprising means for  
2 inputting data into the maintaining means and means for displaying the referral lists.

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